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AUTHOR Holmstrand, Lars
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ABSTRACT

Parallel to the implementation of the comprehensive school system in Sweden, English has become obligatory for all pupils and has acquired increasing prominence. This is a report on the EPAL (English at the junior level) project in Sweden, a project which can be compared to FLES in the U.S. and the French-teaching project in England. The general purpose of the project was to investigate the effects of early English teaching in comprehensive school, and particularly to study the effects of time schedules for English whereby instruction begins in the spring term of grade 1. Psycholinguistic arguments are cited in favor of the early teaching of foreign languages, as well as early experiments which also support elementary foreign language teaching. Due to such factors as proximity to Uppsala and availability of teachers and materials, the Vasteras school district was chosen for the experiment. One experimental and three control groups have been followed from grade 1 through 5. The next measurement will occur during the 1976 spring term, when the pupils will be in grade 6. Materials suitable to younger pupils were developed during the project, as well as group and individual tests. Conclusive results will have to await the analysis of the vast amount of data collected so far. (AM)

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Project no.: 217

In progress at: Department of Educational Research, Uppsala School of Education

Project leaders: Lars Holmstrand, Lennart Linell

Scientific leader: Professor Karl-Georg Ahlström

Background

At the beginning of the 1940s, foreign language studies were reserved for the fraction of pupils in each school year who went on to higher schools after elementary school or who happened to live in the handful of school districts where special permission had been obtained from the National Board of Education for the teaching of foreign languages in elementary schools.

The reform of compulsory schooling which began during the 1940s, with the appointment of the 1940 and 1946 School Commissions, led to a gradual expansion of foreign language studies - particularly English - in schools. Parallel to the implementation of the comprehensive school system, English has become obligatory for all pupils and has acquired increasing prominence as one of the most important practical subjects on the timetable.

English studies have been introduced in progressively earlier grades. In its draft scheme for a nine-year comprehensive school, the 1946 School Commission recommended English studies from grades 5 to 7 inclusive. During the subsequent experimental stage, English was taught on a compulsory basis from grade

5, and elementary schools were also enabled to introduce English studies from the fifth year.

The 1957 School Commission proposed in its main report concerning comprehensive school (1961) that English studies should begin in grade 4. Among other things this proposal was grounded on the change which had occurred in the goals of language teaching and which had led to a transformation of teaching methods. Thus the Commission felt that language teaching should start "before the stage where the desire and ability to imitate begin to decline". (SOU 1961:30, p. 298).

In presenting its proposals, the Commission also expressed itself in favour of an even earlier commencement of English studies than in grade 4. However, this seemed to be ruled out for the time being by a shortage of junior level teachers qualified to teach English.

The 1962 Compulsory Education Bill (Prop. 1962:54) included a summary of the comments received from different authorities and organizations on the report of the 1957 Commission. It was observed that the proposal concerning the teaching of English in grade 4 had been given a strikingly favourable reception and that some respondents, including the Confederation of Swedish Trade Unions (LO) recommended the commencement of English studies in grade 3. The Bill did in fact envisage the experimental teaching of English in earlier grades within the near future.

The 1962 Comprehensive School Curriculum followed the intentions of the School Commission by making English compulsory as from grade 4.

The 1957 curricular review led to the proposal that English be made compulsory from grades 3 to 9 inclusive. Practically all the authorities and organizations consulted seconded this proposal, and several of them, including LO and TCO (the Central Organization of Salaried Employees) recommended consideration of an even earlier start. The Minister of Education

therefore proposed in the Government Bill which followed (1968:129, p. 70) that local education authorities should be empowered to rule in favour of minor time schedule adjustments between different grades so as to make it possible, for instance for English studies to begin before grade 3.

Foreign languages at elementary level in other countries

Concerning the teaching of foreign languages in other countries, developments in the USA and England are of particular interest.

In the USA, considerable successes had been scored towards the end of the 1960s by the FLES (Foreign Languages in the Elementary School) movement. Before the 1950s, there were very few places in the United States where languages were taught at elementary level, but the number of school districts introducing FLES increased rapidly after a number of authorities had declared their support of the earlier commencement of foreign language studies. Even in 1962, only a very small proportion of all pupils at elementary level were studying foreign languages, but figures for December 1967 indicated that FLES had been introduced in the majority of medium-size and large school districts and in about half the smaller ones (Donoghue, 1969).

In England a broad-based experiment in the teaching of French to primary school pupils from the age of eight years was launched in 1963. Following a crash scheme of teacher training and teaching material production, French was introduced in primary Schools all over the country. In the evaluation of this project, three generations ("cohorts") of pupils, each generation comprising 5-6,000 children, have been studied over a period of several years. The principal aim of this study was to see whether French studies could be introduced on a general basis and for all primary school pupils. One of the questions at issue was whether any considerable gains could be made in the command of language by letting the children start French lessons at the age of eight instead of 11 (at secondary level). (Burstall; 1967, 1969).

Psycholinguistic and other arguments in favour of the early teaching of foreign languages

Efforts for the early introduction of foreign language studies in schools were founded on various arguments concerning the advantages of such teaching. Great influence would appear to have been exerted in this respect by the well-known neurophysiologist Wilder Penfield, whose theory concerning the superior brain plasticity of persons in the younger age groups had first been propounded in the early 1950s.

On the strength of his findings concerning the physiology of the brain, Penfield concluded that the child's brain was more suitable for language learning than the adult's. (Penfield, 1959).

Observations of the ease with which children pick up one or more foreign languages in multilingual surroundings have also been quoted in support of an early start to language teaching in schools. Reference has also been made to the natural curiosity of children regarding language and language sounds, and to their predilection for playing and experimenting with new or artificial words and phrases. (Donoghue, 1967). Another argument for the early commencement of language teaching has been the relative spontaneity of younger children, as opposed to the greater self-criticism and self-consciousness which overtake them between the ages of ten and twelve. (Gorosch et al, 1967, p. 26).

Another type of argument commonly propounded is that the early acquisition of a foreign language must become part of the basic acquisition of skills on a level with the reading and writing of the child's native language. The underlying idea of these arguments is that, living as we do in a world where many languages are spoken, it is indefensible for education to create "a rigidly monolinguistic setting". In the name of equality therefore, not to mention other reasons, children should be introduced to other languages and cultures at the earliest possible stage of their schooling. (Stern;

1966, 1969).

It has also been argued that there is more time available for foreign language studies at primary level than at secondary level. (van Willigen, 1961). Some have maintained that the earlier language teaching is started, the greater the total amount of time which can be made available for it. (Carroll, 1969, p. 62-63).

Research into the teaching of foreign languages at elementary level

Very few systematic research findings were available when the EPÅL project started. Many of the studies then existing were of limited schope, as were the conclusions to be drawn from them.

One early experiment involving the teaching of a foreign language to pre-school children in Leningrad led to the conclusion that children between the ages of five and six could learn to speak and understand a foreign language with amazing facility. Among other things it was observed that pre-school children could master language sounds more easily than older pupils. (Ginsberg, 1960).

Other investigations also seem to show that pronunciation ability is superior in the youngest children. For instance, a study of the English pronunciation of Cuban immigrant children in the USA showed that the best pronunciation was most commonly found among children who had entered the USA before the age of six. (Asher & Garcia, 1969). In connection with the Swedish experiment "English without a book", on the other hand, a comparison of the achievements of children of different ages indicated that the older pupils obtained better results in pronunciation and listening comprehension tests. (Ekstrand, 1964).

In a relatively comprehensive study of the effects of French

teaching from grades 3 and 4 in Chicago schools it was found that pupils from these grades performed better than those who started French later on. (Dunkel & Pillet, 1962).

American research concerning the long-term effects of elementary school language studies on high school achievement appear to indicate that, at least under favourable conditions, permanent learning effects are obtained. (Justman & Nass 1956; Brega & Newell; 1965, 1967).

In a survey of experiences of the early teaching of foreign languages in schools Stern summarized his conclusions as follows (1969, p. 28):".. children have been proved to make an effective start in language learning under school conditions and this early start appears to lay a good foundation for continued language study throughout the period of full-time schooling".

The purpose of the EPÅL project

The EPÅL project originated as part of the debate on teaching material development in Sweden and also as a result of the interest which the early teaching of foreign languages had aroused by the end of the 1960s both in Sweden and elsewhere.

Consequently the general purpose of the EPÅL projekt was to investigate the potential effects of an early commencement of English studies in comprehensive school. But before the purpose of the project could be defined more closely, teaching time for English had to be apportioned between the various grades of comprehensive school for the purposes of the experiment.

It was decided to defer the commencement of English studies until the spring term of grade 1, among other things in order for the pupils to start their important practice of the basic skills of Swedish before they were introduced to an additional language. The project reference group gave detailed consideration to the apportionment of teaching time between grades 1-6. Practical restrictions of various kinds led to

the selection of a time apportionment entailing a minimum of deviations from the time schedules of Lgr 69 (the Comprehensive School Curriculum): see Fig. 1.

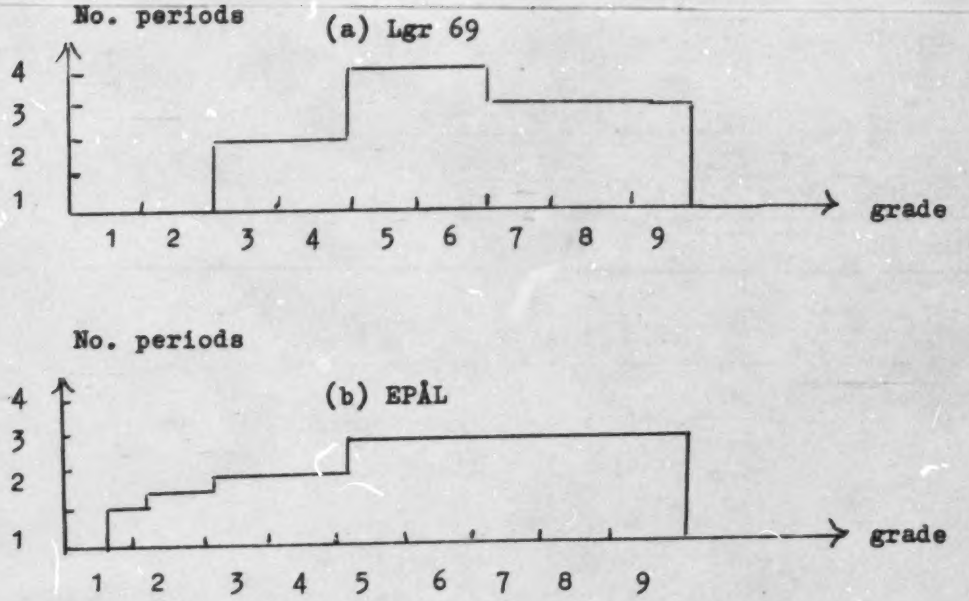

Figure 1. Apportionment of teaching time for English between the various grades of comprehensive school, as per (a) Lgr 69 and (b) EPÅL.

As will be seen, one period per week has been taken from grades 5 and 6 respectively and transferred to grades 1 and 2 for English studies during the EPÅL experiment. To avoid altering the total number of periods in any of the grades, an exchange has also been effected with Swedish. Thus the pupils in the experimental classes will have less time for Swedish at junior level but one period extra per week in grades 5 and 6.

Following the establishment of the time allocation described above, the purpose of the EPÅL project could be defined as that of carrying out a comprehensive investigation of the effects of time schedules for English whereby instruction

begins during the spring term of grade 1 (the time allocation between the various grades being that shown in Figure 1 (b)).

Comparisons are to be made with the Lgr 69 time schedules and, to some extent, with somewhat modified time schedules from Lgr 62*; see Table below.

Table 1 English time schedules compared in the EPÅL project

	Junior and middle levels						Total	Senior level			Total
	grade 1	2	3	4	5	6		grade 7	8	9	
"Lgr 62"	-	-	-	3	4	4	11	3	3	3	20
Lgr 69	-	-	2	2	4	4	12	3	3	3	21
EPÅL	0,5	1,5	2	2	3	3	12	3	3	3	21

The effects of the various time schedules will be evaluated in the following sectors:

A. English
   1) The pupils' knowledge and skills in English
   2) The pupils' attitudes to the teaching of English
   3) The English teaching process

B. General skills and attitudes in school
   1) Swedish
      a) The pupils' knowledge and skills in Swedish
      b) The pupils' attitudes to the teaching of Swedish

   2) Mathematics
      a) The pupils' knowledge and skills in mathematics
      b) The pupils' attitudes to the teaching of mathematics

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* According to Lgr 62, English is allotted 2, 5 and 4 periods per week in grades 4, 5 and 6 respectively. Interim regulations allow an extra period per week in grade 4 and 4 periods per week in grade 5. (Current News from the Board of Education, 1969/70:7, p. 71).

3) The pupils' attitudes to school generally.

Both long-term and short-term effects will be studied, as well as the effects on different pupil groupings, including low performers and immigrant children.

Design

Choice of experimental area

An inventory of conceivable experimental areas led to the conclusion that the Västerås school district was best suited to the requirements of the project, and with the kind consent of the Västerås education authorities the experiment came to be based on that district. The choice of Västerås was above all due to the following factors:

a) Västerås is quite close to Uppsala
b) The various schools present a large number of classes
c) There are enough junior level teachers qualified to teach English
d) Grade 1 starts with a school acclimatization period which includes Ljungblad's autumn tests
e) The Västerås schools are well off for AV equipment.

The Västerås school district was also characterized by an unusually large proportion of immigrant schoolchildren. It was therefore decided to devote special studies during the project to the possible implications for these children of an early commencement of foreign language learning.

Experimental groups

The EPÅL studies in Västerås involve four different groups of pupils: the experimental group (E1) and three "control groups" which have been given the designations K1, K2 and K3.

The main focus of interest is on the experimental group (E1) and its direct comparison group K3. Group E1 is following

the EPÅL time schedules and K3 is following Lgr 69. During the introductory stage, both groups use a teaching material compiled under the auspices of the project. Later on they change to commercially available materials; see Fig. 2.

	grade 1	grade 2	grade 3	grade 4	grade 5	grade 6
E1	0,5 ppw	1,5 ppw	2 ppw	2 ppw	3 ppw	3 ppw
K3			2 ppw	2 ppw	4 ppw	4 ppw

= EPÅL teaching materials

= commercially available materials

Figure 2. English teaching in groups E1 and K3: weekly periods per grade and teaching materials used.

One of the very important functions of the EPÅL teaching material was to make teaching as uniform as possible by giving detailed instructions for every lesson and all items of practice.

Group K2 comprises all the Västerås classes in the same year which are not included in groups E1 and K3. This group is studying English in the usual manner, following Lgr 69, and is using an ordinary, commercially available teaching material.

Group K1 comprises pupils who started school in 1969 and did not start English until grade 4.

The following table lists the experimental groups included in the project. Groups E 1, K2 and K 3 totalled about 1,800 pupils in the school year 1970/71, and K1 numbered just over 500 in 1969/70.

Table 2. EPÅL experimental groups in Västerås

started school	designation	No. classes when starting school	English studies, grades	EPÅL teaching material to begin with
Aut. 1969	K1	29	4-6,11 ppw	no
Aut. 1970	K2	37	3-6,12 ppw	no
Aut 1970	K3	24	3-6,12 ppw	yes
Aut. 1970	E1	24	1-6,12 ppw	yes

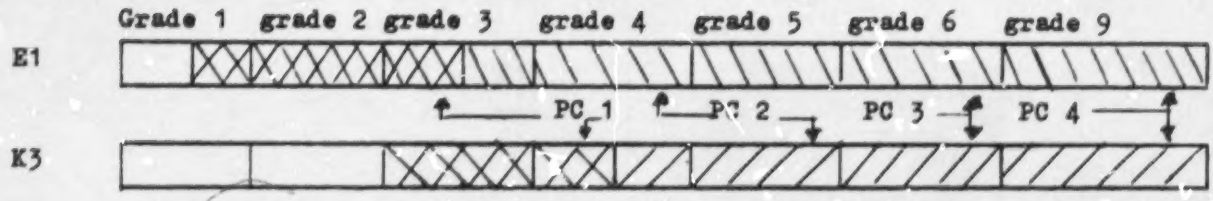
Plan of comparison

English

On three occasions during the junior and middle levels; groups E1 and K3 are subjected to relatively comprehensive measurements in English. These points of comparison, as they are termed, come when the two groups have received equal amounts of instruction. The first point of comparison comes at the transition from the EPÅL teaching material to the commercially available teaching material, by which time three of the total of twelve weekly periods of English for junior and middle level have been used. The second point of comparison occurs when six of the twelve grade-week periods have been used, which means that it comes at the end of the spring term of grade 4 in group E1 and at the end of the autumn term of grade 5 in group K3.

The third point of comparison, at the end of grade 6, is a very important summing up point for evaluation purposes, because the pupils in the two groups are then the same age and have also had the same number of English periods.

Another point of comparison is planned for the end of grade 9; see Figure 3.



PC = Point of comparison

Figure 3. Points of comparison for English in groups E1 and K3.

In groups K1 and K2, only limited measurements will be undertaken at comparison points 2 and 3. Use can be made at these points of those parts of the test batteries which are sufficiently general and are not directly based on the content of the textbooks used in groups E1 and K3. Thus the results of standardized English achievement tests in grade 6 will be among the data collected for all groups taking part in the experiment.

Apart from the measurements occurring at the points of comparison, a number of English tests were taken by groups E1 and K3 during the introductory stage while the EPAL teaching material was being used. Four teacher-directed group tests designed to measure the pupils' listening comprehension were administered after a corresponding period of teaching, and individual tests were taken on two occasions by random samples comprising about 40 per cent of the pupils in each experimental group. These tests, which were conducted by special test leaders, were above all aimed at charting the pupils' speech production from various angles.

While the EPAL teaching material was in use, systematic classroom observations were made of English teaching in groups E1 and K3. Seven consecutive lessons covering exactly the same stages of the English course were observed in both groups. At that time the K3 pupils were about one year older than the E1 pupils: see Figure 4.

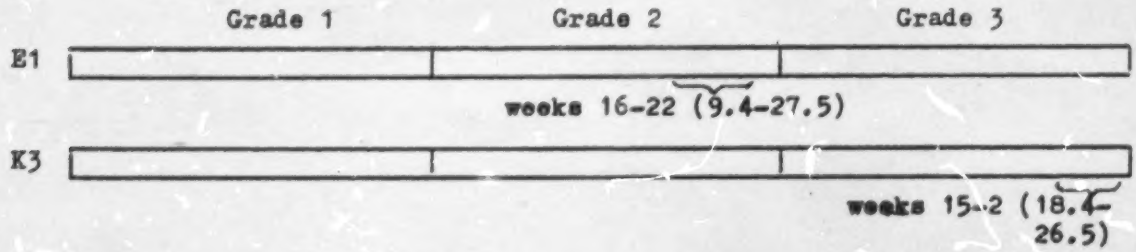
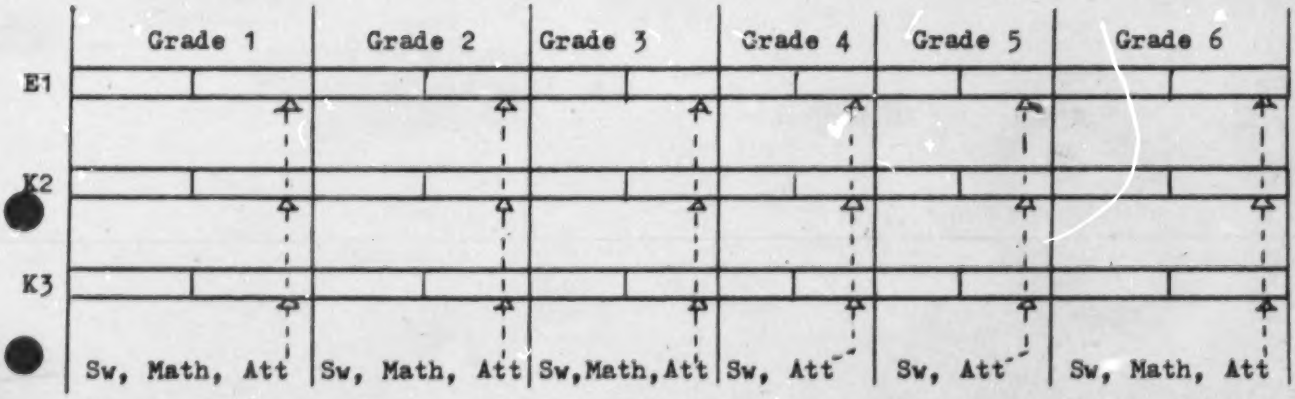


Figure 4. Systematic classroom observations of English teaching in experimental groups E1 and K3.

B. General skills and attitudes in school

Measurements of knowledge and skill in Swedish and mathematics and of attitudes to these subjects and schooling generally are being carried out on the whole of the generation of Västerås pupils that started school in the autumn of 1970 (i. e. groups E1, K2 and K3), as per the following timetable; see Figure 5.



Sw = Swedish test Math = Mathematics test Att = Attitude test

Figure 5. Measurements concerning Swedish, mathematics and attitudes in groups E1, K2 and K3.

All of these various tests are taken at the end of the spring term of each grade and are administered by the teachers taking the various classes. On most of these occasions it has been possible to use existing tests, such as the grade 3 standardized achievement tests in Swedish and mathematics.

Certain of the above measurements were also undertaken in group K1.

Control variables

In the comparisons described above, a check has to be made in certain respects of the comparability of the experimental groups as regards both teachers and pupils. Thus where the pupils were concerned, school readiness test results from the beginning of the autumn term of grade 1 were collected as a means of checking pupil ability during the initial phase. Since the experiment is destined to continue for several years, an ability test was administered in grade 4 to all pupils in experimental groups E1, K2 and K3; see Figure 6.

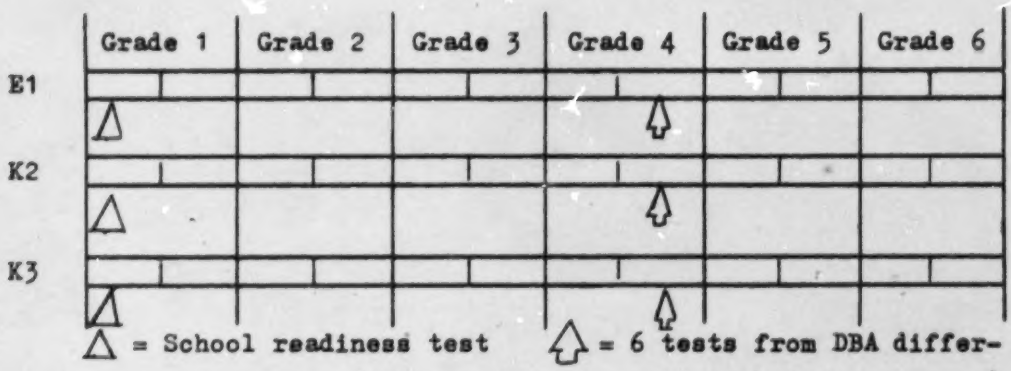


Figure 6. Ability tests taken by experimental groups E1, K2 and K3.

It is also important to investigate the social class status of the pupils in the various experimental groups, because social status or some similar categorization can be presumed to reflect certain differences of home environment which have a bearing on the acquisition of a second language.

A completely different type of control is needed with regard to class composition and pupil transfers. A continuous check must be maintained on the size of classes, the proportion of new pupils the proportion of immigrant children etc., and of

pupil transerfs to and from the classes involved in the experiment. A corresponding investigation is required concerning the teaching staff. Personnel changes, absence due to illness or sabbatical leave, changes of school etc. are all factors which are liable to vary from one experimental group to another.

Teaching proficiency can also exert a measure of influence, despite the close steering of the teaching materials. This factor is not easily measured, but it should be taken into account to some extent.

Conduct of the experiment

Most of the empirical work of the project has now been completed. The pupils taking part in the experiment are now in grade 6, and the only middle level measurements that remain to be taken are the important English measurements during the spring term of grade 6 and measurements of the pupils' general school achievement. Thus the following summary can be presented of the conduct of the experiment.

Teaching

A number of steps have had to be taken in order to make it possible for teaching to be conducted in accordance with the plans for the project.

Firstly the teachers involved have been summoned to regular meetings at which they have been given information concerning the EPÅL project and instructions concerning teaching methods. Some meetings have also included demonstration lessons. These activities have primarily concerned groups E1 and K3. The K2 teachers have only been involved to a minor extent. During the first term of English teaching, visits were paid to all classes in E1 and K3, so as to make sure that teaching was proceeding according to plan and also in order to give the teachers the support and assistance they might need in using the teaching materials.

Secondly a special teaching material had to be compiled for the initial terms of English. This was necessary in order to provide a teaching material whose disposition and content suited the younger pupils. Another reason, as mentioned previously, was that a specially compiled teaching material would help to make the teaching of English fairly uniform as between different classes and groups.

The financial resources of the project were only sufficient for the production of a special teaching material for the first four terms of English in group E1, after which pre-existing material had to be adopted.

Test design

Tests were already available for many of the measurements not connected with English. The following external tests have been used up to and including grade 5:

A. Ability tests

1) Ljungblad's school readiness test (6 sub-tests)
2) DBA (differential ability analysis), 6 sub-tests

B. Swedish tests

1) DLS (diagnostic reading and writing tests), 9 group tests + individual tests
2) Malmqvist's reading comprehension test No. 8
3) The Bergholm test (dictation)
4) Standardized achievement tests for grade 3, 7 tests in all
5) Reading comprehension test ("The fatal Clock")
6) RS 2 (spelling test)

C. Mathematics test

1) Standardized mathematics achievement test in grade 3, 3 sub-tests.

Apart from English tests, the following tests have been constructed in the course of the project:

Swedish Pictorial reading comprehension test (for grade 1)

Mathematics Mathematics test (for grade 1)
Mathematics test (for grade 2), 2 sub-tests

Attitudes Attitude test, various versions of which have been used in grades 1-5.

The following English tests, all of them constructed in the course of the project, have been taken by groups E1 and K3 after equal amounts of English instruction.

A. Group tests

1) Listening comprehension tests, 6 tests in grades 1-4 for group E1 (grades 3-5 for K3). In these tests the children listen to tape-recorded words, sentences or short dialogues in English and are asked to choose the most appropriate of four pictures per question in their test booklets.

2) Reading comprehension tests, 3 in number: 1 pictorial reading comprehension test (sentences or short passages with 4 pictures to choose from) at comparison point 1 and another at comparison point 2, as well as text reading comprehension test (short passages accompanied by multiple choice questions) at comparison point 2.

3) Vocabulary test at comparison point 2.
4) Grammar comprehension test at comparison point 2.
5) Spelling test at comparison point 2.

B. Individual tests

Individual tests have been taken on four occasions in groups E1 and K3 respectively. During these tests the pupils' spoken production was recorded on tape.

1) End of the spring term of grade 1 in group E1 (middle of the autumn term in grade 3 for K3).

a) Active listening comprehension test (the pupil is told in English to stand up, go to the door etc.)

b) Productive test (the pupil is given recorded questions about pictures in an illustrated booklet etc. and his/her answers are recorded)

c) Pronunciation test (the pupil is induced, by means of questions and pictures to pronounce certain critical words and phrases)

2) End of the spring term of grade 2 in group E1 (end of the spring term of grade 3 for K3).

a) Productive test

b) Pronunciation test

3) Comparison point 1.

a) Productive test

b) Pronunciation test

c) Free production (the pupil is given a certain amount of time in which to describe the content of a picture in his/her own words)

4) Comparison point 2.

a) Productive test
b) Pronunciation test
c) Free production

Collection of data

Practically all the above mentioned group tests were administered by the teachers themselves in their various classes.

Usually the teachers were first informed of scheduled tests at the beginning of the school year. Additional, more detailed information concerning the tests was distributed well in advance of the test period. All test material and the appurtenant instructions were then distributed to schools via the normal internal delivery channels. Teachers were then free to choose the most convenient occasion for the tests within a certain period, usually a week.

Special test leaders were used for all individual tests and for the listening comprehension tests at comparison points 1 and 2. Prior to each test, the test leaders were given careful instructions and were trained for the test administration procedure that each test required.

Data processing

Data routine

Most of the data collected have been processed by the following routine. First of all certain background data such as the pupil's national registration number, class and experimental group etc. are entered on the individual test paper when it arrives. In most cases the pupils' answers to the various questions are then transferred directly to punch cards. Some tests are marked manually and the results transferred to punch cards.

The next stage of the routine is for the raw data lists from the computer to be checked against the test papers and any errors put right. As a further precaution, a computer programme is then run which checks that the different figures come within specified maximum and minimum limits, and another programme is run to check that the pupils' national registration numbers have been entered correctly.

Data register

The large quantities of data which have gradually been accu-

mulasted during the EPÅL project presents a serious problem of perspective. What is more, careful trace has to be kept of all pupil transfers affecting the classes in Västerås taking part in the experiment. A special procedure was developed to surmount these difficulties.

After the results from a test have been processed in the manner indicated above, participation in the test is noted in a special register. The tests are entered chronologically in the register, and for each pupil there is a line corresponding to each of the experimental groups. Thus the register can show which pupils, say, have moved away from Västerås, which pupils have migrated there from other places, which pupils have changed experimental groups and so on. The register also makes it possible to calculate and classify drop-out rates for each test.

Current plans

Where the collection of data is concerned. the next milestone will be comparison point 3, which comes during the spring term 1976, when the pupils will be in grade 6.

Preliminary results from the measurements in grades 1-5 have been obtained for the great majority of the group tests. Some of these results can be reported fairly soon, but the great amount of material recorded on tape during the individual English tests will have to be analysed before any serious processing can be attempted.

Address

Pedagogiska institutionen
Lärarhögskolan
Östra Ågatan 9
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